

February 14, 2023

Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

I am the Executive Director of Building One Community, a nonprofit organization located in Stamford. Founded in 2011, B1C's mission is to advance the successful integration of immigrants and their families into our society. We achieve this through programs that educate, employ, and empower immigrant families and individuals while engaging the entire community.

B1C supports **HB 06616** on behalf of the thousands of clients we serve because its expansion of HUSKY health benefits will promote a safer and healthier community for immigrants and everyone else in the communities where they reside. We applaud this Committee and the General Assembly for the advances in recent years in HUSKY coverage for Connecticut children who may be undocumented, but those important first steps – protecting all children through age 12 and certain children through age 18 – have not gone far enough.

Many of the people B1C serves have had to cope with illness and injury without insurance. One particularly relevant case involves a 13-year-old immigrant girl who needed surgery for a cyst. She could not afford it due to her lack of insurance. While she was applying to Yale for financial assistance, the surgery was delayed for six months, in part because of language barriers during the application process. The delay interfered with her ability to urinate, resulted in immense pain and trauma, and interrupted her schooling. Notably, this girl is ineligible under the current HUSKY program.

We know from research relied upon by the State Department of Social Services that (a) expanding public health benefits for young people increases college enrollment and postpones the age at which young women have their first child, (b) the young adults who have benefited from expanded healthcare access pay more in taxes and require less public assistance in later life, and (c) individuals with expanded healthcare access when young have fewer hospitalizations as adults. All of these benefits from expanded HUSKY eligibility are critical for those served by B1C. In its 12 years of existence, B1C has served over 14,300 immigrants from 117 countries. These people have formed the backbone of our economy, and their education, health, and welfare are vital for our future.

The COVID pandemic was particularly cruel to our immigrants, but your committee and the General Assembly responded to the heroism of many immigrants who kept our communities functioning with a heroic expansion of HUSKY eligibility, something that only a handful of states accomplished before Connecticut. Our fiscal prudence in Connecticut has provided the resources to enable another heroic increase in eligibility right now. Your approval of **HB 06616** will help cement improvements in healthcare to benefit our citizens for generations.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you would like any further information, I can be reached at abadurina@b1c.org or (203) 674-8585 x104.

Anka Badurina, Executive Director